



*Afrobarometer Briefing Paper No. 134*

**Interrogating Citizens’  
Economic Well-being,  
Government Economic  
Performance and Social Service  
Delivery in Sierra Leone**

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## **1. Background**

Sierra Leone is a potentially rich country endowed with an abundance of mineral wealth and human capacity, which ensured moderate annual economic growth rate of 4% immediately after independence in 1961. Over time, the economic fortune of the country gradually dwindled as a result of mismanagement arising from political governance challenges, including the creation of one party state dictatorship, high levels of public official and political corruption and military coups. The high optimism and expectations held by the citizenry at this point gave way to spasms of violence which culminated in the brutal decade (1991-2002) long civil war. The civil war coupled with the structural weaknesses in governance ruined most of Sierra Leone’s economic and public service delivery infrastructure, and consequently slowed down economic growth and development.

The end of the conflict in 2002 ushered in a new atmosphere of democratic governance. Since then, the country has conducted three peaceful and successful national elections in 2002, 2007 and 2012. The general acceptance of the results of these elections has demonstrated that the process of democratization in Sierra Leone is on course and bodes well for the sustainability of peace and stability. Moreover, the country has been undertaking major economic and public sector reforms. As a result, the economy has been showing signs of recovery, with annual growth averaging around 7% before declining to 5.5% in 2008 and 4.5% in 2009 as a result of the global crises. Also, there has been progress in the area of the government’s re-engagement with civil society groups (including women and youth) and their integration into the country’s political process.

Despite these moderate gains, challenges still exist. The country is highly dependent on donor aid which constitutes 19% of the country’s gross national income with a much higher percentage when the overall national budget is considered. Poverty is endemic and manifested in high concentrations in both rural and urban areas outside the capital city, Freetown with 60% of the six million populations living on less than a dollar a day. Unemployment amongst the growing youth population is estimated to be about 46% of the population. Also, social infrastructure or amenities, water and electricity supplies still remain inadequate.

This briefing paper assesses citizens' perceptions of their economic well-being, government's economic performance and public and social services delivery using the first Afrobarometer survey data collected in Sierra Leonean in 2012.

## **2. Afrobarometer Survey**

The Afrobarometer is a comparative series of public attitude surveys, covering 35 African countries in Round 5 (2011-2013). It measures public attitudes on democracy and its alternatives, evaluations of the quality of governance and economic performance. In addition, the survey assesses the views of the electorate on critical political issues in the surveyed countries. The Afrobarometer's main goal is to produce scientifically reliable data on public opinion in Africa while strengthening institutional capacities for survey research, and sharing research findings to inform policy and practice. The Afrobarometer also provides comparisons over time, as five rounds of surveys have taken place from 1999 to 2013.

Afrobarometer surveys use a common survey instrument and methodology. The instrument asks a standard set of questions that permits systematic comparison in public attitudes across countries and over time. The methodology was based on a national probability sample of 1,200 adult Sierra Leoneans selected to represent all adult citizens of voting age, allowing for inferences with a sampling margin of error of +/- 3% at a 95% confidence level. The sample was drawn randomly based on Probability Proportionate to Population Size (PPPS), thus taking account of population distributions, gender as well as rural-urban divides. The sampling process ensured that every adult Sierra Leone citizen had an equal and known chance of being selected in the sample. Fieldwork in Sierra Leone was conducted by ITASCAP Limited, Sierra Leone between 23 June and 18 July 2012.

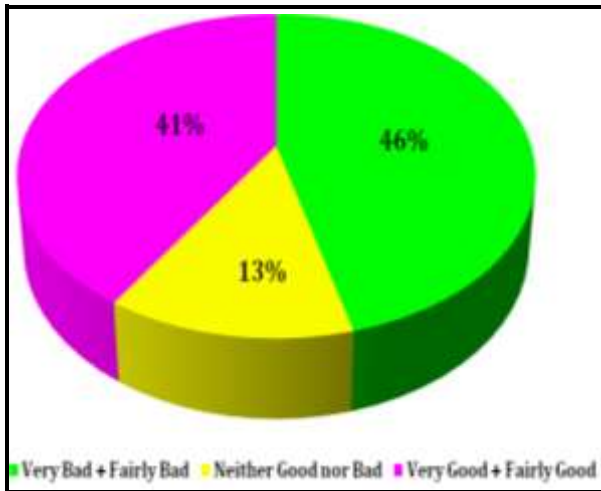
## **3. Economic and Living Conditions and Government's Economic Performance**

One important key to the improvement in the socio-economic conditions of the people of Sierra Leone is the proper management of the economy and equitable redistribution of wealth. To understand what citizens think about the progress being made in these areas, Afrobarometer tracked citizens' opinions on the national economic condition, their living conditions, and experiences with shortages of basic needs. It also asked citizens what they think about government's economic management performance.

### **3.1. Assessment of Present Economic and Personal Living Conditions**

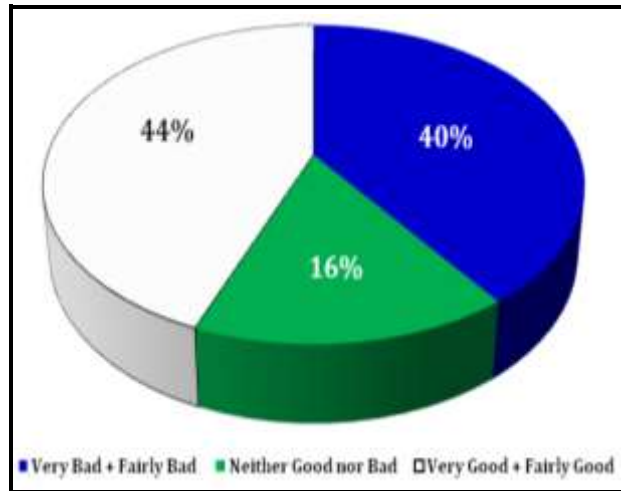
Sierra Leoneans appeared to be split in their opinion on the current condition of the national economy as well as their personal living conditions. Four in every ten Sierra Leoneans think the current economic condition (46%) and their present living conditions (40%) are "*very bad*" or "*fairly bad*". On the flip side, almost similar percentages described the economic outlook of the country (41%) and their own living conditions (44%) as "*very good*" or "*fairly good*". Just a little above a tenth considered the national economy (13%) and own living conditions (16%) as "*neither good nor bad*" (Figures 1<sup>A</sup> and 1<sup>B</sup>).

**Figure 1<sup>A</sup>: Opinion on National Economic Condition**



Source: Afrobarometer survey, 2012

**Figure 1<sup>B</sup>: Opinion on Present Living Conditions**



Source: Afrobarometer survey, 2012

Questions: (A) Looking back, how do you rate the economic conditions in this country compared to twelve months ago? (B) Looking back, how do you rate your living conditions compared to twelve months ago?

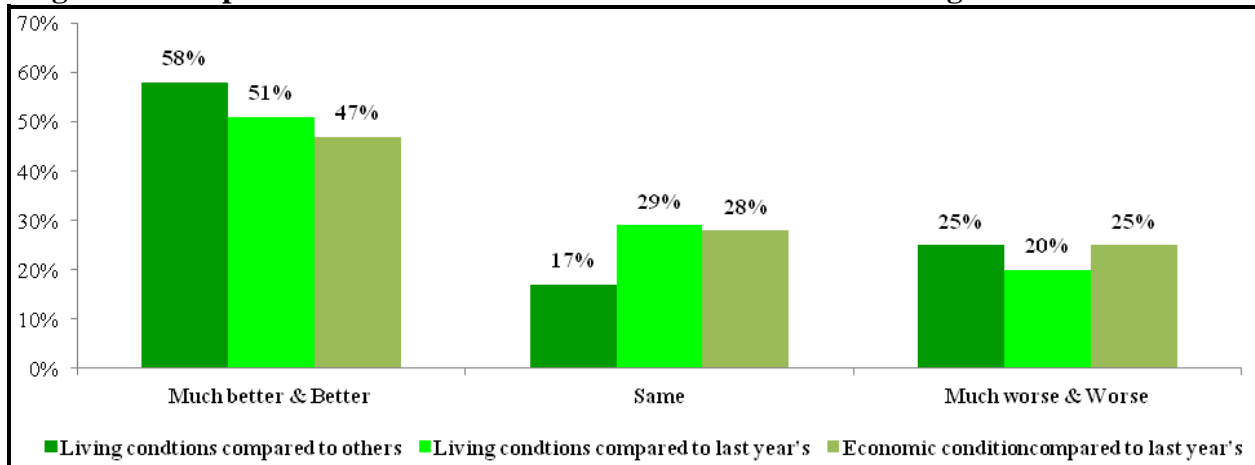
### 3.2. Comparative Assessment of National Economic and Personal Living Conditions

In spite of the split in opinions on current economic and personal living condition, majority of Sierra Leoneans shared the opinion that the national economic conditions as well as living conditions have to some extent improved.

Over half of Sierra Leoneans (58%) assessed their own living conditions as “*much better*” or “*better*” compared to those of their compatriots. Nearly similar percentage (51%) held the view that their living conditions are “*much better*” or “*better*” than it was 12 months ago. With regards to the national economy, a small majority (47%) felt the national economy is “*much better*” or “*better*” than it was in the immediate past year.

These encouraging findings notwithstanding, appreciable percentages claimed their living conditions compared to others (25%) or the previous year’s (20%) as well as the national economic conditions compared to 12 months ago had worsened. Similar numbers (i.e. 17%, 29% and 28%) were of the opinion that nothing has changed (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Comparative Assessment of Economic and Personal Living Conditions**



Source: Afrobarometer survey, 2012

Question: In general, how do you rate your living conditions compared to those of other Sierra Leoneans?

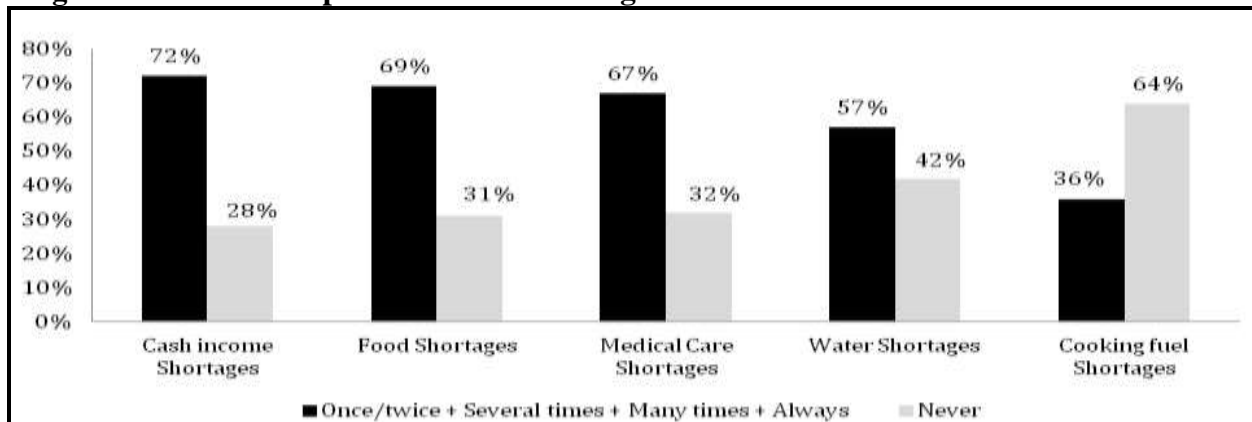
Questions: Looking back, how do you rate the following compared to twelve months ago: (1) economic conditions in this country (2) your living conditions?

### 3.3. Experience with Shortages of Basic Necessities

Though Sierra Leoneans agreed that compared to the past year, economic and living conditions have witnessed some amount of improvement, they generally suffered significant shortages in basic necessities in the year gone by.

As depicted in Figure 3 below, over the past year, 72% of Sierra Leoneans, including members of their families went without cash income in the past year. Another 69% said they did not get enough food to eat in the past year. Nearly equal numbers (67%) went without enough medicines or medical treatment while a little over half (57%) went without enough clean water for home use. Only with fuel for cooking did the survey reveal a minority (i.e. 36%) claiming they and their family members suffered shortages.

**Figure 3: Citizens' Experiences with Shortages of Basic Needs**



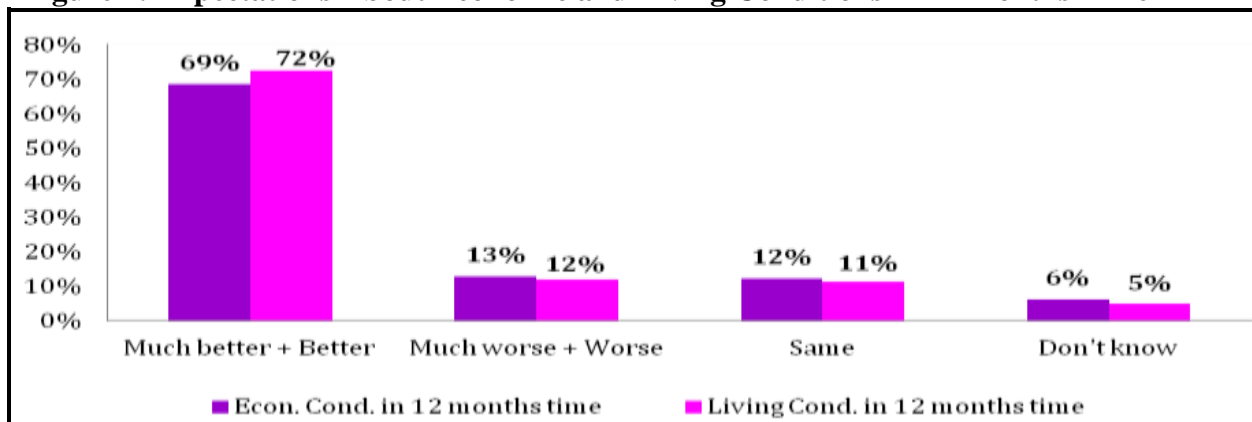
Source: Afrobarometer survey, 2012

Question: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family [e.g. Gone without enough food to eat]? (% of respondents reporting “just once or twice”, “several times”, “many times”, or “always” and “never”)

### 3.4. Expectations About Economic and Living Conditions

In general, Sierra Leoneans are very optimistic about economic and living conditions in a year’s time. When asked “Looking ahead, do you expect the (a) Economic conditions in this country to be better or worse in twelve months time and (b) Your living conditions to be better or worse in twelve months time”, a majority of Sierra Leoneans (69%) expected the national economic condition to be “much better” or “better” in 12 months time. Similarly, a majority (72%) are also expecting “much better” or “better” living conditions in the coming year (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Expectations About Economic and Living Conditions in 12 Months Time**



Source: Afrobarometer survey, 2012

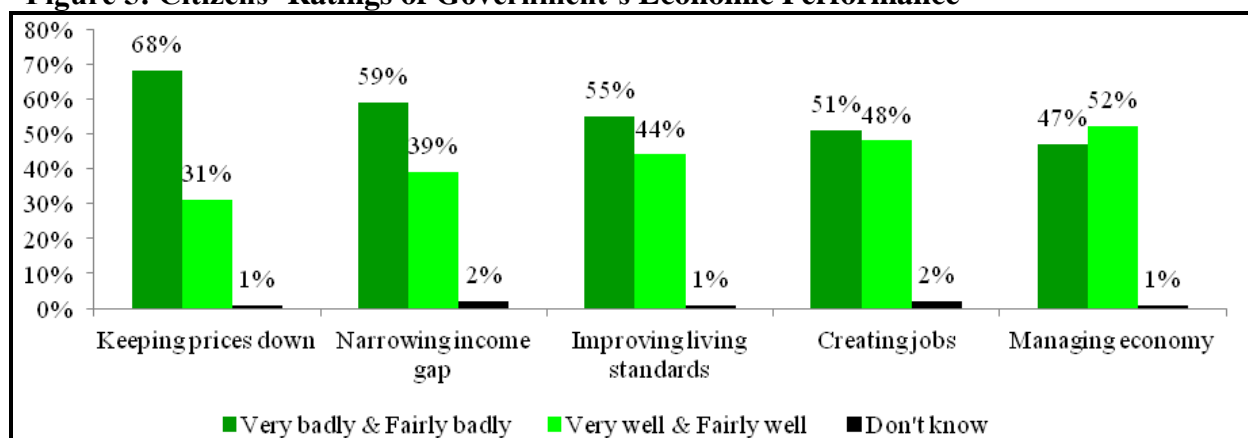
Questions: Looking ahead, do you expect the (1) Economic conditions in this country to be better or worse in twelve months time and (2) Your living conditions to be better or worse in twelve months time?

### 3.5. Popular Ratings of Government’s Economic Performance

Given the opinions expressed by the Sierra Leoneans interviewed regarding the national economic condition and their personal economic well-being, how well or badly do they think the government has been handling economic matters? Sierra Leoneans in general rated government performance negatively across four macro-economic indicators. Over half of those interviewed (68%) rated the government’s performance at keeping prices down “very bad” or “fairly bad”. Similar majorities also described government’s efforts at narrowing the incomes gaps (58%), improving living standards of the poor (55%), and creating jobs (51%) in the same terms. Notwithstanding the unfavorable assessments on specific economic indicators, we found that a

small majority of Sierra Leoneans (52%) perceived the government as having distinguished itself in the overall management of the national economy (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Citizens' Ratings of Government's Economic Performance**



Source: Afrobarometer survey, 2012

Question: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: (1) keeping prices down; (2) narrowing gaps between rich and poor; (3) improving living standards of the poor; (4) creating jobs; (5) managing the economy?

#### 4. Social Services Challenges and Government's Social Services Delivery Performance

The Afrobarometer tracked respondents' views regarding problems encountered while accessing healthcare and education services in the year preceding the one in which the survey was conducted. Furthermore, it tracked respondents' opinions on issues related to personal safety from crime and their ratings of government's performance in meeting its social services delivery mandate.

##### 4.1. Experiences with Healthcare and Education Services' Delivery

There appears to be a myriad of problems in the delivery of healthcare and education services at the local level. When asked "Have you encountered any of these problems with your local public clinic or hospital during the past 12 months", appreciable percentages as presented in Table 1 indicated having experienced lack of medicines/supplies (61%), long waiting time (60%), absent medical doctors (59%), expensive service/inability to pay (55%), lack of attention/respect from service providers (52%) and dirty facilities (45%) "once/twice", "a few times" or "often" in the past year. It is worth noting that the government, in the midst of such challenges has instituted free healthcare services for pregnant women and children under the age of five.

**Table 1: Problems Encountered in Healthcare Service Delivery**

	Once/twice + A few times + Often	No experience in past year	Never	Don't know
Lack of medicines/supplies	61%	25%	12%	2%
Long waiting time	60%	25%	12%	2%
Absent Doctors	59%	25%	13%	2%
Service too expensive/unable to pay	55%	24%	17%	2%
Lack of attention/ respect	52%	25%	20%	2%
Dirty facilities	45%	25%	28%	1%

Source: Afrobarometer survey, 2012

Question: Have you encountered any of these problems with your local public clinic or hospital during the past 12 months?

Though the percentages who also claimed they faced some difficulties “once/twice”, “a few times” or “often” in accessing education services in the past year are in the majority, they are, however, generally lower compared to those regarding healthcare service delivery.

At least, nearly half of Sierra Leoneans interviewed had problems with absent teachers (50%), lack of textbooks supplies (49%), poor teaching (48%), poor conditions of facilities (47%), over-crowded classrooms (43%) and service too expensive/inability to pay (43%) (Table 2).

**Table 2: Problems Encountered in Education Service Delivery**

	Once/twice + A few times + Often	No experience in past year	Never	Don't know
Absent teachers	50%	35%	12%	2%
Lack of textbooks supplies	49%	35%	13%	2%
Poor teaching	48%	35%	14%	2%
Poor conditions of facilities	47%	35%	16%	2%
Over-crowded classrooms	43%	35%	19%	2%
Service too expensive/unable to pay	43%	33%	20%	2%

Source: Afrobarometer survey, 2012

Question: Have you encountered any of these problems with your local public schools during the past 12 months?

#### 4.2. Opinions on Personal Safety from Crime

Generally, most Sierra Leoneans never felt their personal safety and security was threatened during the past year. From Tables 3 and 4, six in every ten Sierra Leoneans interviewed said they and their family members never felt unsafe walking around in their neighborhood (68%) or crime in their homes (68%) over the past year.

Indeed, 65% said they neither had something stolen from their houses nor were attacked physically (86%) in the past year. However, it is worth noting that sizeable minorities felt unsafe in their neighborhood (31%), feared crime in their homes (31%), suffered theft in their houses (35%) and got attacked physically (13%).

**Table 3: Popular Opinions of Experiences with Social Services Delivery: Public Safety**

	Unsafe walking in neighborhood	Feared crime in home	Something stolen from house	Physically attacked
Never	68%	68%	--	--
Just once or twice	10%	10%	--	--
Several times	12%	9%	--	--
Many times	5%	5%	--	--
Always	4%	7%	--	--
No	--	--	65%	86%
Yes, Once	--	--	13%	6%
Yes, Twice	--	--	13%	4%
Yes, Three or more times	--	--	9%	3%

Source: Afrobarometer survey, 2012

Questions: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: (1) felt unsafe walking in your neighborhood, (2) feared crime in your own home?

Questions: During the past year, have you or anyone in your family: (1) had something stolen from your house? (2) been physically attacked?

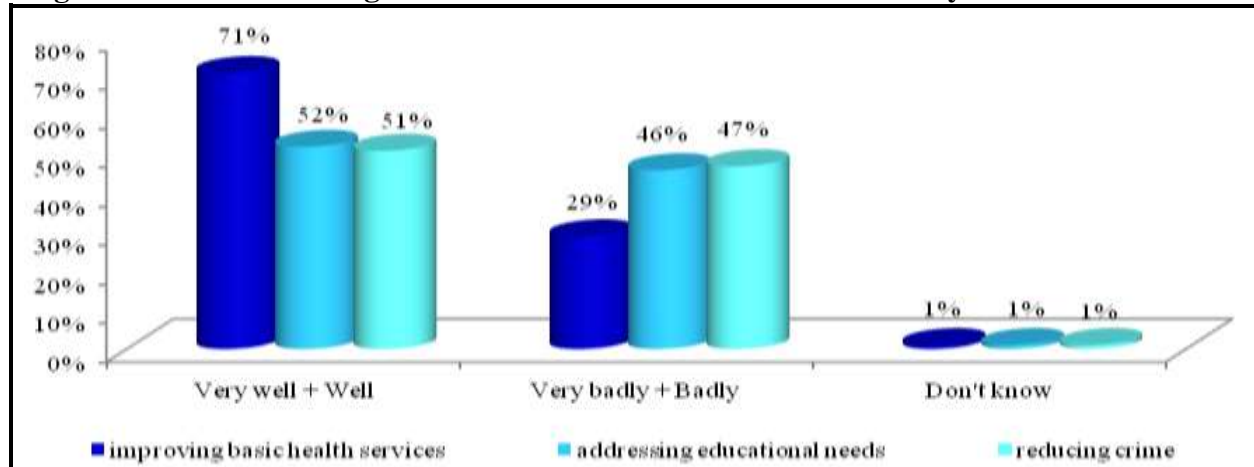
#### 4.3. Popular Ratings of Government’s Social Service Delivery Performance

Despite the fact that a majority had various challenges in accessing healthcare service at local public clinics, a large majority (71%) still believed the government has performed “very well” or “well” improving basic health services. On the other hand, respondents were nearly split in their



assessment of education and public safety and security services delivery by government. Whereas 52% rated government's performance in addressing education needs as "very well" or "well", 46% felt the government has performed "very bad" or "fairly bad". Similarly, opinions were also evenly divided on the assessment of government's performance in reducing crime positively (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Citizens' Ratings of Government's Social Services Delivery Performance**



Source: Afrobarometer survey, 2012

Question: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: (1) improving basic health services; (2) addressing educational needs; (3) reducing crime?

## 5. Economic Opinions and Government Performance Ratings Correlation

Are there relationships between Sierra Leoneans' opinions on economic and living conditions and their ratings of government's economic performance on one hand, and opinions on social services and the performance of government in the delivery of such services on the other hand? This section of the paper explores these aforementioned relationships using correlation analysis to establish associations between pairs of indexes<sup>1</sup> constructed from the various economic and living conditions, social services and performance variables. The results are presented in Table 4.

### 5.1. Economic and Living Conditions and Government's Economic Performance

First, we found that the correlations between opinions on national economic and living conditions and government's economic performance were in the anticipated directions (i.e. correctly signed) and were to some extent quite strong. Secondly, these correlations were statistically significant (i.e. p-value = 0.01). A positive association was found between perceived bad economic/living conditions and bad government's economic performance (i.e.  $r = 0.628$ ). Bad government's economic performance again correlated negatively with the conclusion of

<sup>1</sup> **Note:** We used exploratory factor analyses based on principal components extraction with Direct Oblimin Method when delta equals 0 (the default) to tease out relevant variables for the construction of the eight indexes. A group of variables were pooled to measure a given concept only if the eigenvalue has a total greater than 1 (i.e. total > 1). In addition, reliability analysis was conducted to check the internal consistency and assess the collective reliability of the set of items used to develop each index in measuring their underlying concept. The following are the estimated statistics of each scale: **Index for bad economic & living conditions** (Total = 1.820; % of Variance = 90.978; Cronbach's Alpha = 0.900); **Index for better economic & living conditions compared to past year** (Total = 1.904; % of Variance = 95.220; Cronbach's Alpha = 0.950); **Index for better economic & living conditions in a year's time** (Total = 1.868; % of Variance = 93.415; Cronbach's Alpha = 0.930); **Index for problems in accessing education service** (Total = 3.365; % of Variance = 56.083; Cronbach's Alpha = 0.841); **Index for problems in accessing healthcare service** (Total = 3.444; % of Variance = 57.407; Cronbach's Alpha = 0.849); **Index for good personal safety and security** (Total = 2.233; % of Variance = 55.832; Cronbach's Alpha = 0.732); **Index for bad govt. economic performance** (Total = 3.546; % of Variance = 70.923; Cronbach's Alpha = 0.897); and **Index for good govt. social services delivery performance** (Total = 1.997; % of Variance = 66.565; Cronbach's Alpha = 0.748).



better economic/living conditions compared to past year (i.e.  $r = -0.488$ ) and the expectation of better economic/living conditions in a year's time (i.e.  $r = -0.287$ ) respectively.

## 5.2. Social Services Challenges and Government's Social Service Delivery Performance

Similar to the previous findings, the relationships between opinions on social services and government's performance in social service delivery also carried the expected signs. The results were significant (i.e.  $p$ -value = 0.01), but not as strong as the previous ones.

Assessment of government's social services delivery as good correlates positively with good personal safety and security (i.e.  $r = 0.107$ ) but negatively with problems in accessing education (i.e.  $r = -0.199$ ) and healthcare (i.e.  $r = -0.155$ ) services.

**Table 4: Economic and Living Conditions, Social Service Delivery and Government Performance Correlations**

	Index for bad govt. economic performance	Index for good govt. social services delivery performance
Index for bad economic & living conditions	0.628**	--
Index for better economic & living conditions compared to past year	-0.488**	--
Index for better economic & living conditions in a year's time	-0.287**	--
Index for problems in accessing education service	--	-0.199**
Index for problems in accessing healthcare service	--	-0.155**
Index for good personal safety and security	--	0.107**

Source: Afrobarometer survey, 2012.

Note: \*\* implies correlation significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

## 6. Conclusion

Sierra Leoneans expressed mixed opinions about the national economic and personal living conditions and experienced shortages of basic necessities. However, they agreed that the current economic and personal living conditions were an improvement over the past year's conditions and are highly optimistic about conditions in the coming year. In the midst of the mixed opinions about current economic and living conditions, Sierra Leoneans' rated government performance in managing key macro-economic indicators negatively. Not at all surprising, there appears to be a significant positive association between negative views of Sierra Leoneans regarding national economic and living conditions and negative ratings of government's economic performance. On the other hand, favorable opinions about current national economic and living conditions compared to the past year and optimistic views about national economic and living conditions in a year's time had significant negative correlation with unfavorable assessment of how government has felt managing economic issues.

On the social service delivery front, a majority of the people of Sierra Leone indicated that they experienced various problems while accessing healthcare and education services at the local level in the past year. However, a majority never experienced threats to their personal safety and security during the same period. Again, while problems in accessing education and healthcare services respectively, turned out to be significant negative correlates of good social service delivery performance assessment of government, good personal safety and security registered significant positive association with positive government social service delivery performance.

Thus, opinions on economic conditions and social service delivery are to a large extent related to government's economic and social service delivery performance assessment of government respectively. Given these findings, the government of Sierra Leone should make the management

of the macro-economy and the delivery of efficient social services to citizens a priority if it hopes to improve national economic and living conditions and access to social services, and subsequently, reap the associated political rewards.

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